

Washington County Museum  
Oral History Interview with Tino Ornelas  
At Ornelas Enterprises Office  
July 9, 2012

Informant: Tino Ornelas  
Interviewer: Michael O' Rourke  
Transcriber: Carly Lave

M= Michael  
T= Tino

M: This is Michael O' Rourke for the Washington County Historical Society. Beginning my interview with Tino Ornelas. Is that how you pronounce it?

T: It's pronounced Orenelas.

M: Okay. On November 1<sup>st</sup> 2000. Today's interview is being taken place at Ornelas' Enterprises office on Evergreen Parkway, in Hillsboro. Tino, it's your intention to donate this interview to the Washington County Historical Society?

T: Well I'm a business man, should I do this or shouldn't I do this? (chuckle chuckle). Of course.

M: Okay. Well, I'd like to start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

T: I was born and raised in Colorado.

M: Okay.

T: A small town named Florence.

M: Mmhmm.

T: In the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

M: Okay. And what were your parents doing there?

T: Um, my parents were also born and raised in Colorado. My grandparents came into this country from Mexico, way back in 1910. In Florence, in Colorado area, they mostly worked in the Coal Mines. But maybe sometimes we would work in the fields. So we weren't migrants, but we did work in all the fields picking bean, onions, and picking cherries. I hated it. Haha I hated it with a passion.

M: And is that what your family did then?

T: Yes.

M: Mmhmm. So you did it from an early age?

T: Oh yes. I was out in the fields when I was six or seven years old.

M: Oh boy. Ah huh.

T: Very early. We did.... Working in the fields, for survival. Ya know, cause we were very very poor.

M: Mhm.

T: Uhhh heck I can remember one time, we were... we had boil potatoes and the flour gravy to eat for a week straight. And that's all we had. And for a Mexican family not to afford beans and tortilla, that's what you call poor. (Both chuckle heartedly). And uh, it was pretty bad.

M: Did you live in mostly Hispanic or Latino community there/ then?

T: No Florence, it was about thirty to forty percent Latino community, but it was scattered. There were all other ethnic people there, Anglos and whatnot. So it was all intermixed. There was no Latino community, or no Bodio, or anything like. It was like Hillsboro is today, a regular town.

M: And what kind of crops did you work back in those days?

T: Anything that was growing! (Both laugh). Anything that they wanted us to pick! We did everything from topping beats, to picking beans to pulling onions to bucking hay. Apples, Cantaloupes, watermelons, all that stuff.

M: Mhm. And you said your grandparents were there as well?

T: My grandparents were there also. They settled in that country way back in 1910, like I said.

M: Mhm. When they came to this country, were they illegal immigrants? Or did they come here legally?

T: No my grandparents were legal. In fact, I was talking to my Aunt, that was just here last month more about our family history, and uh both of my grandparents on both maternal and paternal side were legal. In fact, I even have one of my grandfather's green cards. So they were legal.

M: And were they part of your growing up? You knew your grandparents?

T: Oh very much so. My parents were not, they broke up when I was about four years old. So I came from a very disruptive life when I was young. So the grandparents stepped in and sort of raised us kids.

M: Okay, so your...

T: My older brother, and my older sister, and my younger sister, so there were four of us. And uh it was... I don't know... I guess I can't... I don't know the word I want to use. It was a very disruptive life I guess. In fact, I started the first grade, ya know the first day of first grade, which is very traumatic to a young individual, a young child. I started first grade, in a strange city, with a strange family, in a strange school. Because my father had taken me, supposedly for the weekend, and put me some place else, only he knew where I was at. So I stayed with this family

for about three months. And until my grandfather found at where I was at, and he come and got me and brought me back home.

M: Oh, I see. And so your father took you there because..

T: He knew my mother would've had me.

M: Uhuh.

T: Ya know.

M: The family was breaking up. And it was just his way of dealing with the kids. (laugh). Finding a way to get you in school and settled. But then your grandfather came and brought you back to where you'd been living previously? Or...

T: To his house, yes.

M: Yea, okay. Mhm. Mhm.

T: Which is a very very lovely, mutually hustled..If it wasn't for my grandparents, I don't think I'd be at where I am today.

M: Uhuh.

T: They gave us a foundation. For later life.

M: And were you still in touch with your father and mother then?

T: Oh yea. They, eventually we went back to our mother, and lived with her on and off. And whatnot. And then my grandfather died, through the years. Then finally, when I was about seventeen, I quit high school and joined the United States Navy. Now why I did that, I still don't know to this day, ya know. It was probably the worst decision I ever made.

M: (laugh).

T: In high school, ya know, I was pretty.... Popular I guess is a good word. In school work, I was always carrying A's and B's. But I was Vice President of my Junior class and I was Vice President of my Freshman class. So one day it was just a bunch of us guys got together, or boys, said well why don't we go join the navy, and see the world. So, we did it! (both laugh).

M: Well, so when you were still in Florence you were living at in that time?

T: Mhm.

M: And you said you worked the fields from about six years on?

T: So I worked the fields every summer until I left.

M: So what other kinds of things did you do as a kid growing up in Florence? Did you have any spare time activities?

T: Florence was a small town. So everybody knew each other. We would always have a lot of fun. Ya know, there was a Bowling Alley, a lot of activities going on. But that was in the late fifties. So most of the kids would drive Main Street.

M: Uhuh. Uhuh.

T: So teenagers would get in the model of their Mothers car... and we'd all drive Main Street back and forth for hours. We didn't get in any trouble or anything like that. But it was a nice idealic time.

M: Uhuh. And uh, were you able to borrow your grandparents car then?

T: Yes. Yea, well there was a bunch of us kids hung up together. One of us was always be able to get somebody's car and then drive it.

M: Mhm.

T: It was funny, uh in order to get gas, we'd go out and we'd scrounge around for pop bottles.

(M laughs)

T:... and sell pop bottles back for two cents apiece, in order to buy a couple dollars worth of gas.

(both laugh).

M: And so it sounds like you did well in school.

T: I never had any problems in school. I did well in school.

M: Ahuh. Actually, before I talk to you anymore about school, I also wanted to ask what kind of person your grandfather was. Can you tell me any about his personality?

T: Well both my grandparents, paternal and maternal, were living in the same city. In fact, they lived a block from each other. So we had influence from both of em. My paternal grandfather had lost his right leg in a mine when he was about nineteen. So he would be the one that would take care of us monetarily. Buy us clothes, feed us and whatnot. And then my other grandfather that we were living with...

M: This would be on your maternal side, then?

T: On my maternal side. He was an entrepreneur from the word go, ya know. When he first came to this country, he had his own tavern. He had a bakery. He was self taught in law. So when the migrants would come in, and they couldn't speak English, and they had to go to court for some reason, he would be the interpreter lawyer type person. He was also a coal miner. He owned his own coal mine. And for a Latino in those days, to own their own coal mine, to own their own anything, was really unique. I remember I was five years old, and my grandfather took me to his mine in the foothills. And it was just a small, four man mine type of thing, ya know. And he took me down into the mine, way at the bottom. And I still remember it was dark, and it was hot, and you had to wear the little lamp on your helmet. And at the bottom of the mine was a donkey. And this donkey had been down there... God knows how long. But it was blind, from

being in the dark. And it was white. And they would use that donkey to pull the rail cars up. And I felt so sorry for that animal. And to this day I guess you can call me an animal lover because I cannot hurt any animal. I cannot, I just love animals... and dogs. I've had a dog all my life. It was a unique experience. And both grandparents stated right from when we were small, that right or wrong, that they would speak to us in English. Because in order for us to survive, we must be fluent in English, in speaking and reading. They would talk to each in Spanish, but they would not talk to us kids in Spanish. So the Spanish we picked up was by listening to em. So to this day, I can understand it, but I can't speak it because I think in English.

M: So your first language was English?

T: My first language was English, is English. Yes.

M: Mhm.

T: And my mother, and my Aunts second generation were also the same way. They wouldn't do the same thing as them. But they'd speak Spanish because they spoke each other in Spanish a lot. They were very bilingual. But in that town, I don't know if it was unique or not, but in that town most of the Latino families were that way. All of the kids my age didn't speak Spanish. They all... all the parents said, you will learn English. If you can speak Spanish on the side, that's okay. But English is your first language.

M: Mhm. What about your two grandmothers? What uh, what did they do?

T: Well, haha, it's a cultural thing now. The ladies in the Latino communities always took a back step to the men. They were always in the background. My grandmother was always in the background. She would be the one who would quietly feed me. Quietly give me the hugs and kisses. Quietly tuck off back in the corner when my grandfather... when I irritated him. Cause I was always ornery and I would irritate every little... I think I was their favorite. At least I hope I was. But she was the quiet and nurturing.. and most females at that time, were that way. Very quiet. Just a cultural thing.

M: And how often would you see your parents then in those days would you say?

T: I wouldn't see my parents then for months.

M: They didn't have a great influence then, when you were growing up.

T: No. The only influence they had on me was negative.

M: Yea, uh just not being around.. uh my father was uh.. Should I be talking about this for historical purposes? (both laugh) My father was a hard drinking gambler and always moving around. And my mother she ran away with another man. And was trying to start a life with him. Type of thing, ya know.

M: Uhuh. And then you mentioned you did quite well in high school in those days. A and B student is what you said. What were some of your favorite subjects? Or did you have any?

T: Yea, I liked em all. Those days we had drafting, mechanical drawings, and I liked biology. History, I loved history and English. All of em. Um, and I even took typing in those days. This was late fifties, early sixties. And I was the only boy in the whole typing class. But I took typing

as an elective, just to take it. It was probably the best class I ever took. That typing class has helped me to this day. When I'm on the computer, (prrrrrr sound) just like I'm typing it in high school. And it was great.

M: (Laughs) Yea, a lot of people I think, who didn't learn typing at that age, had somewhat of a disadvantage when the PC era came in.

T: Absolutely, yea.

M : What was high school like as a social experience for you?

T: Ah, it was great. We always had fun. Ya know, played football, basketball. We went to all the dances. Ya know, we had the social differences. Your rich white Anglos are always the social lites, and everybody else. Ya know, typical high school. There wasn't any difference than anybody anyplace else.

M: Did you ever feel any discrimination? Or any problems along those lines in Florence when you were growing up?

T: Uh, there was a little bit. But not much. People would not go out of their way to discriminate. Uh I didn't really feel a lot of that. No. We felt right at home. All of us. In that small town. There were other towns, like Denver, where there was a lot of discrimination that I felt and saw.

M: Ah, okay.

T: But in our town there wasn't.

M: And did you go spend time in Denver then?

T: That was later and after I was married and whatnot. And later years that I did that.

M: Okay. I see. And um did you have relatives in Mexico?

T: Sure.

M: And were you in touch with those at all when you were growing up?

T: Sure. My grandfather on my father, my paternal grandfather, had a brother way down in a city called Zacatecas. And when I was 12 maybe 13, he wanted to go down and visit his brother. So he contacted my cousin, my first cousin, who was older in his probably early twenties, and asked if he would drive him down here. And he said yea, I'll take you down there. And I asked if I could go. And my grandfather said yea lets go. So the three of us jumped in the car, and we went down into way out of interior Mexico, almost out of Mexico city. For about a month. Um great experience for me. Only bad thing about it, that my grandfather being from the country, he understood everything. So when we would go into a city or something, driving into a town. Instead of going into a restaurant, a normal restaurant, he would go on one of these side streets where the little restaurants were. Family owned type thing. Where you're eating and underneath your feet were the pigs and the chickens running around and all that stuff, ya know. I got homemade poisoning. And I got very very sick down there. They had to take me to the hospital. In fact, I almost died down there with poisoning. It took about a week to get over that. But other than that, it was a great experience. I enjoyed all of it.

M: So that was your first trip to Mexico down there?

T: Yea, that was my first trip. That was my first perception of organized religion in that we went into this village, and I don't know how big it was, and in the middle of this village was this cathedral. So I went into the cathedral, and went inside, and I'm by the way with this story, I am Catholic, and this relates to it. And in this cathedral were these beautiful statues. Baroqued in gold, ya know. Like most cathedrals are. And this statue, Viejo Guadalupe, was standing on a lock of gold. It must have been six inches high. By a foot wide, by a foot long. Solid gold. And you could see in the block where somebody had tried to steal it, and cut it into four pieces. Well I found out during the revolution, the revolutionists tried to steal it and cut it up to sell it. But somehow or another they didn't make. Anyway, I walked out of that cathedral, and I was standing on the front steps, and I was looking around at that village. And that village was full of Adobe huts, no running water, sewers down the middle of the road, and I looked back into that cathedral with all that wealth, and I said this is wrong. This is really wrong. These people are starving almost, yet this church has all this wealth. And from that moment on, ya know I'm only thirteen years old, I've been against organized religion. As such. I still believe in god. And I still believe my success today is because of that. But organized religion, is not part of that.

M: That's quite a remarkable insight for a thirteen year old.

T: It was.

M: So then you returned to Colorado, I assumed from that trip?

T: Yea, we came back and I just went on with my normal life.

M: Mhm

T: It was only until, this is funny. My cousin that drove, I really loved that guy. He was one of the best individuals. But he was one of those... you know what a Patchuko is? Um, in the 1920's and 30's there would be cliques or, they weren't really gangs yet. Groups of Latino's, Mexican people, kids, teenagers, who'd wear the Zoot Suites. You know what a Zoot Suite is? You ever heard of a Zoot Suite?

M: I've heard of a Zuit Suite.

T: K, I've got some pictures up here on my wall you can look at. And those were called the "Zoot Suiters" and they were just teenaged fad at the time. Well eventually the Zoot Suiters, evolved into juvenile delinquent gangs. And mean ones too. Well he was part of that clique, part of that environment. Uh so we would call him our, our Family Patchuko. Patchuko is a Zoot Suite. It's Spanish for Zoot Zuite.

M: Uhuh.

T: Sort of like a derogatory term. But anyway, he was a very melancholy guy. But he was always in trouble, he was in prison. But one of the most warm-hearted guys you've ever met in your life. And it was only until years later, after I was in the Navy, or just getting out of the Navy, he had told me that when he went into Mexico with us, he filled that whole car up with dope. And drove it back. And I was in that car! (both laugh) And my grandfather was in that car! (laugh).

M: So he didn't even know you were smuggling?

T: No!! He didn't know... and he laughed. He said, "Yea boy, I made a lot of money."  
(both laugh). Subsequently, my cousin died. Uh, of a liver failure. Cause he was into Alcohol a lot. Very sad.

M: Uhuh. When you were in Mexico, did you uh have much contact, drug contact with the people?

T: Oh sure. And this is a guy who didn't speak Spanish!

M: Yea, that's what I was thinking.

T: And I was in there with all the little girls. And all the girls would come and say, "You don't speak Spanish either," in Spanish. I said No. And they said, well we'll take care of you. So those people took care of me, ya know. I'd go to the bank, and change money for my grandfather. And people would help me. Now, I spoke enough to get along, but I wasn't fluent. And uh, yea. It was okay. People didn't look down on me or anything like that. They knew I was American, naturally.

M: Right. And you had that one insight about the divisions between them.... The poor people in the streets.

T: Sure did.

M: Any other insights about the Mexican people? Or things you noticed at the time.

T: No, the other time was just.. It was nice cause it was just like a tourist is all. So nothing major.

M: Yea, you noticed differences. So suppose uh, cultural in terms of their day to day life, cultural differences between America and Mexico, I'm sure.

T: Yea, they were there but I didn't.....

M: Yea. Well, so then you were, you told me a few minutes ago, that joining the Navy was maybe a mistake for you. But you joined the Navy.

T: Well, and there's a, almost. Let me back up, let me restate this.

M: Sure.

T: Joining the Navy itself was not a mistake. Quitting high school was the mistake.

M: Ah, okay.

T: When I joined the Navy, and I joined for four years.

M: And so you were what? A junior in high school?

T: Yea. The navy itself gave my life structure, discipline, and purpose. Whereas I didn't have that before. In the seventeen years before that I was really on my own. With my grandparents.

But you know how grandparents are, with grandkids, they let the grandkids do whatever they want. I mean, they love ya and all that stuff, but they spoil ya. So I didn't have any parents for discipline or structure. And when I joined the Navy, that's where I, that's when I got that. And so I was in the Navy for four years. And one year in Vietnam. So I spent a year in Vietnam. But like my Aunt says, she says, "Ya know Tino, you kids," myself, and my brothers, and my two sisters, "had such a bad life in your younger years, that you've always had an angel watching over you. Somebody's taking care of you." But she's a real religious individual. On the other hand, she's right. In that, when I joined the Navy, I went to boot camp. And from boot camp, I couldn't go to a school because I didn't have a high school degree.

M: Where was boot camp?

T: San Diego.

M: Okay.

T: So from boot camp to the city, right straight to the ship. Which was an air craft carrier. So when I got on this ship, there was about thirty of us, "Boots" that just got out of boot camp. And what they do is, they line you up, and then everybody, all the chiefs everything from the divisions come up and they select who they want in their division, ya know. Like this one guy would say, "Okay, I need you you and you. You gonna be in this division and all you're going to do for the next four years is paint a ship." There called Boatsalines. And that's all they do. They chip the paint, and they repaint, and maybe they take care of the boats. But there's no career. I mean, there's... you want to paint for the rest of your life type of thing. "Okay you you, you're going to go down and you're going to work shoveling coal." And it's not cold, but in the fire rooms. So you had no say in what you were going to do. You were selected. And they were going down the line. And they came to me. And this guy stepped forward and said, "You're coming with me, and were taking you up, and were going to put you in radar. You're going to learn how to uh, become a radar operator." Which is a career in itself! So in four years I was in radar, I learned how to, everything about radar, I learned how to direct and guide airplanes around the ship...

M: Mhm. Hold on, one

*Tape Flip. Chunk of interview missing. Picks up about 1 minute later.*

T: ....On radar. Out of these thirty guys, I was the only one selected to do that. Why? No reason. It just was.

M: Roll of the dice, huh?

T: Roll of the dice. Absolutely. So that is my start of my high tech career really. They sent me to a couple of electronic schools and whatnot.

M: And uh, let's see, what year was it that you joined the Navy?

T: I was in, I joined in 1962 and I got out in 1966.

M: Uhuh. Okay.

T: And I was in Vietnam, in 65-66.

M: Okay, I was going to ask you where you were stationed on the carrier. So you went to Vietnam? What was that experience like?

T: It was scary. We knew we were going to war. Um, we didn't know what to expect. Because this is just the start of the Vietnam war in 65'. So we didn't know if there was going to be any sea battles or not. We had no idea what to expect. As you well know, Vietnam was a land war. Naval power was just mostly the air planes. So we got, the closest we got to the whole conflict was our airplanes. And uh, it's not good listening to those pilots being shot down over Vietnam. Ya know, we would listen to em' and try to get em' back, and send in rescue's trying to get em' and whatnot.

M: Mhm. Were you in court at all in Vietnam?

T: No, not at all. Naval forces did not, when they needed to refuel or refuel for rest and relaxation, they went to either Japan or The Philippines.

M: Uhuh, so you saw, spent some time there in Japan and The Philippines.

T: Mhm. Right.

M: Uh, were you stationed anywhere else besides Vietnam?

T: No, I was, well I was on board that one ship for four years. So its homeport was Long Beach.

M: Okay.

T: So, I was in California a lot. And we was in the far east. In those four years I think I made four Far East tours. So it we visited all the ports: Australia, Japan, The Philippines, Hong Kong.

M: So you did see a bit of the world then?

T: Well I saw a lot of the world when I was in the Navy, man. And it was fun. I was young and single and uh I think I was making forty dollars a month.

M: Uhuh

(both laugh)

M: Uh, so did you enjoy your Navy experience?

T: Oh I loved it.

M: Mhm

T: Oh yea. Ya know, It's been thirty thirty-five years since I got out, and I still dream about it every once in awhile. It was a unique experience.

M: Uhuh. Any particular foreign port that you remember?

T: oh the best one was Hong Kong, above all else.

M: Uhuh, you like Hong Kong?

T: Oh yea. Hong Kong.

M: Mhm. Mhm Why was that?

T: It's just, so vibrant. The city itself. And I don't know about today with the communist rule, but uh it's just so vibrant. So many things going on. So many markets you can visit. All kinds of different things, and the pricing was so cheap. But then again life was very cheap there too so....

M: Yea. And then I guess you wound up in Birmingham at the end of your tour of duty, is that right?

T: No, what happened, one time when we come back from Tour Duty Two, we were in Long Beach. And the city of Seattle, invited the carrier to come up and visit them during Sea Fare. Don't they have a big festival up there called Sea Fare? Just like Rose Festival. So the carrier came into Seattle and uh about ten of us sailors took leave when we were up there, four day leave. And we just went around the city and met people, and visited the city, and had a big party. It was great. So when the ship went back to port, we were all of us almost getting ready to get out. So we all talked around and we all said, "Well why don't we all move to Seattle after we get out and live there." Cause we all liked Seattle. So after the tour of duty, there was this one, two, three, four, five, there were six of us sailors that all met in Seattle. And we lived there and the rest is history. I came from Seattle down to here.

M: Uhuh. But you met your wife in Seattle?

T: I met my wife in Seattle, mhm. Yea, I was, for me it was probably more difficult to get out of service in the other end. Like I was saying, it gave me structure and purpose in life. But when I got out and was back in the suburban life, I was twenty-one years old, single, and I was bouncing off the walls. I mean I just, I didn't know what to expect. So soon in life. I didn't know what to do. And, I was about this close, just a few fractions of inch from re-enlisting, just to go back into that structured life. That's when Joy, I met Joy.

M: You were gonna re-enlist?

T: Yea, I was gonna re-enlist. I thought I needed to go back into the Navy because I wasn't making it in the civilian life. I was, what we were doing, us sailors, the first three months was just party.

M: Uhuh.

T: I mean, really really party. Cause we all had a lot of money. Naturally when we got out of the Navy with all the money that they gave us, I didn't know what to do with myself. And then I met Joy and she was the one that, she was more aggressive than I was. She was the one that grabbed me instead of me grabbing her type of thing.

M: And how did you meet her?

T: Through one of the other sailors. The other, one of the other guys had a date with this girl, and she said, "Oh this girl has a sister. Why don't you come over and meet her." And I really didn't want to... and I don't know why, but eventually I met her and it just went on from there. And you have to talk to her about the rest of ...

(both laugh)

M: And, you say uh she pursued you though, huh?

T: Yea, my wife. She knew, form what she said, she says, "As soon as I knew that you were the man for me, there's nothing that was going to get in my way." In fact, I was a little hothead. I was still bouncing off the walls. And we had got in an argument; I can't remember what the argument was. And I dropped her off at her home, and I left in a huff, and went back to our apartment. There was two of us staying there living together. The apartment was about a good five miles away, maybe even ten miles away. So I dropped her off at about midnight, maybe one o' clock in the morning. And I got back to the apartment, and we went to bed went to sleep. And I woke up the next morning at six because I had a job, and there she was sitting in the living waiting for me to wake up. She did not want me to go to work, or leave without making up to me. And she walked from her house, all the way to my apartment.

(M laughs)

M: Wow. And what was your job?

T: I was at Boeing, in assemblance. Putting things together.

M: And then, did you marry her in Seattle?

T: Married her in Seattle.

M: Okay, and continued working Boeing then?

T: We married in Seattle, her parents were in Seattle. I was working at the Boeing Company. Uh, Joy and I bought a house there. And then a Boeing employee that I knew there, quit Boeing company and came down to Beaverton cause and started working in Techtronics. He had called me, this was in 19... the middle of 1969. And he called me and he said, "Hey, ya know Techtronics has a job down here. Why don't you come down here and work for us." He was trying to recruit me. And I went to my supervisor at the Boeing Company, and said, "Ya know, I have a chance to go to Portland down there, and work for Techtronics. What do you think? I didn't really want to do it, because we owned our own house and everything was, ya know we was having a good time. Everything was nice. And my supervisor said, "Ya know, if I was you Tino, I'm thinking I would take that." I didn't figure out what he was talking about, ya know. He said, "Just take it." So we came down to Techtronics and I interviewed. And they offered me a job. So I went back up and I was going to talk to my supervisor again, but when I went back up there, there were starting to hand out pink slips. This was the big forty-thousand people layoff.

M: Ahh.

T: Member' the old statement, "Whoever leaves Seattle, turn the lights off?"

M: (laughs)

T: That was the beginning. So I took the job with Techtronics, but we lost our house up there. It got so bad up there we couldn't even sell it. We tried to keep it, but we couldn't do. We finally just had to give it back to the mortgage company. We was so devastated. That was our first house. ABut the economy in Seattle was terrible. And that's how I got here to uh...

M: ... Washington County.

T: Washington County.

M: Did you live out here from the beginning then?

T: We lived in Beaverton from the beginning.

M: Mhm. And your first job at Tech, was doing what?

T: Making circuit boards.

M: Okay. Mhm.

T: The raw circuit board. Uh, in the belly, in the basement of building 50.

M: Uhuh. And so were you working on the production line then?

T: No, this was a little bit different. We were, we were the ingenuity.

M: Okay.

T: It was just, there was only five or six of us. And we would make little prototype ingénue circuit boards for the engineers at Techtronics.

M: Okay.

T: And these little ingénue circuit boards we would make em' within twenty-four hours. So the engineer would have his idea...

M: And give you a design,

T: Give us a design, and he'd go home for the night. And when he came back in the next morning, he'd have a circuit board.

M: Uhuh.

T: Which was really unique. I mean these guys, these engineers had everything. I mean you don't get circuit boards overnight anymore, in twenty-four hours.

M: Yea.

T: That's what we did.

M: And then, but then eventually you moved up into management of Techtronics?

T: Sure, being me, I've always been, I've always wanted to do the best that I can do. In whatever endeavor I can do. So when I first started, ya know, I was not looking at what I was doing, I was looking at what my boss was doing, ya know. Whatever he was doing, I wanted to do it better. So I've always, made myself promotable. And I was at Tech for twenty years, and I was in various jobs. My last one there was a Purchasing Manager, ya know.

M: And that, I suppose that Techtronic experience sort of prepared you to start your own business?

T: Oh, very much so. Ya know, we... I have to give so much credit to Techtronics. Cause I wouldn't be where I'm at today. Techtronics called me and my family, put a roof over our head, gave me an education, sent me to school. A total amount of classes. I got my Bachelors at Tech in Business.

M: At one of the university's here?

T: Marylhurst University. Right

M: Mhm.

T: So I had my Bachelor's from there. This is a high school drop out now. (laugh). And I could never say anything bad about Techtronics.

M: What made you decide to leave Tech and start your own business?

T: Techtronics was... I was there at the heyday of Techtronics, when there was over twenty-five thousand people employed. I was also there at the end, when they were laying off masses amount of people. I didn't like being part of a downsizing corporation. I didn't like no matter what you did or how well you did it, it didn't make any difference. You were still part of the downsizing. So I helped shut-down building 16, which was the metals plant. They tried to make it a subsidiary, or make it work as a subsidiary. But that didn't work. They eventually decided to shut it down, and just make it no more. So I was there for two years helping them shut it down, off-loading things and whatnot. And after that two years, they asked me to come back to Tech. and I had had enough of corporate life. I've always had that old entrepreneur's spirit in me from my grandfather. I know that.

M: Uhuh.

T: And I've always wanted to have my own company. So in those two years I was helping shut down the company, I prepared myself more. I made sure that my education was finished. I did a good marketing strategy of what was needed out there if I started my own company. Plus I networked a lot.

M: So you had a vision then of the type of company you would start? And what you would do...

T: Yes, very much so.

M: And how did that, did that come to you all at once? I mean, was it sort of obvious what it was you were prepared to do, or how did that develop?

T: See I knew that companies, big companies, would start eventually wanting to offload some things, some kind of assemblies, I just didn't know what kind was going to be done. So I went out and I did a micro search talking to various people who, "Would you offload this type of seat for somebody else to do it for ya?" "Well maybe, maybe not. We don't know yet." But I knew that eventually there was going to be a good market there. A good niche. "Niche" I guess is how you pronounce it. So I told my wife I didn't want to go back to Tech, and I wanted to start our own company. And my wife being the good person she is said, "Whatever you want to do, I'll back you up a hundred percent." And then I told her, in order to do this we have to hock everything we own. And after a few more minutes she said, "Okay, if that's what you want to do." So we hocked everything we own. Our house, our cars, everything. Even our dogs.

M: You just borrowed out to the max?

T: Out to the max. And we borrowed 25,000 dollars.

M: Mhm.

T: Because no bank was going to lend you money to start a company. They will only lend you money after you are successful. So the exception in the first year or two, you have to fund it on your own. So I borrowed 25,000 dollars, and I started a company.

M: On only 25,000?

T: Yea. On only 25,000 dollars. And this is not taking a salary or anything like that. The only thing I took out of the company was some minor expenses. We lived on Joy's salary cause she was working at Instrumentics. But I knew that the company that I started would be in mechanical assemblies. Little cables, little odds and ends that people didn't want to do on their assembly lines. I rented eighteen hundred square feet of space over here at rock part two-eighteen. The first six months was quite an experience. No business. No customers. This is a true statement: I would call my wife at work, at her work, and I'd say, "Would you call me back, I want to make sure the phone is working cause it's not ringing."

( M laughs)

T: Seriously.

M: No clients at all?

T: No clients. None. Zero. And just by my own network, and by knocking on doors, by talking to people.... I can't remember, probably six months into the business we finally got our first purchase order. And it was for sixty-five dollars. And from that one purchase order, we just kept getting a little bit more and a little bit more, little bit more, making a reputation for ourselves. So from a deficit of 25,000 dollars, we are now a four million dollar company. Three to four million dollar company this year, in 2000. Probably three in a half, somewhere in there.

M: So in about eight of nine years time then.

T: In nine years time.

M: Mhm. And so you said that before you left Techtronics you were thinking about marketing and doing a certain amount of networking. But that didn't result in any actual contracts which you had...

T: No. That's just talking to people. And I was just asking them ya know, "I'm thinking of leaving Tech and opening this little business, And what do you think of me doing this? Would you ever send me any business if I did this?" And they would say, "No, no, no." "Well how about this?" "Well maybe, ya know." So I was just, I was trying to get ideas of really what I wanted. I knew it would be in some kind of assemblies. I knew that. I don't know why I knew that. I just didn't know what type of assemblies.

M: You were trying to find out where the market was...

T: I was trying to find out where the market was.

M: Mhm. And I bet you must've had some doubts about how well you judged that in those first six months.... (chuckle).

T: yea, it was spooky. It was really scary. And ya know, when I'm talking to people who want to start their own business, and I like doing this, I give them an example. I say, "Ya know, when you're thinking about opening your own business, it's like walking into the edge of the Grand Canyon and looking down. When you make the decision to open your own business, you step off the edge. And there's nobody gonna help you but yourself. There's no parachute. There's nothing."

M: What did you do in those first six months?

T: Lot of phone calls, lot of talking to people, lot of walking, lot of asking, ya know. Just person to person contact. Everybody I knew I would call.

M: And did you have any, were you the sole employee then?

T: Oh, sole employee.

M: Mhm.

T: All by myself.

M: Mhm. And then once the contracts started to come... you mentioned the first one was for sixty-five dollars. What was the first one by the way?

T: The very first contract was a friend of mine. Had a golf shop up in Vancouver. And he needed some little plastic pins to put in golf irons. The golf handle, to make them longer. So I had to get this pin, and take some of the wood off, so it would slide down into the shaft. And he ordered a hundred of them. For sixty-five dollars. I think he did it out of the kindness of his heart. I don't think he needed them. So I got it done and all that stuff. And they were correct and everything else. And that was my very first one.

M: Uhuh.

T: For a golf show. Then the next biggest one was this other, in fact there still in business right down the street. They do compressions. They make, they have golf balls where they make all kinds of labels on golf balls. Well what they would do, they'd make gift packs of three balls inside a little wood box. And they would sell these in the stores. Ya know, you could buy or pick up a nice wood box with nice labeled balls on it. Well he gave me the contract to build the little wood boxes.

M: Ahuh.

T: And that was the first big contract we got. And I don't remember what the amount of money was. But that got it started.

M: And do you continue to supply that?

T: Oh no no no. It got to the point where we finally talked about it, and by that time I was doing well with the run of things, that a wood box needs to be made in a wood, lumber type of environment. Not this kind of environment. Cause there was dust and everything flying all over ya know, from cutting the wood. It was very dirty. So working together, we found a guy that would do it for him. In a better type of environment.

M: Ahuh. And you eventually got into electronic assemblies?

T: Yea, now we just start. Ya know, I've always been talking about electronics. So I got into electronics.

M: What was your first real business there?

T: Oh, Intel.

M: Okay.

T: one day I got a call from an engineer. He says, "I'm looking for something to rework a computer chacy. I have ten of these chacies that need to have a hole drilled out, or something like that." And I said, "Okay I'll come over, and I'd like to talk to you about that." So I went over to his building, and sat down. And he had these small chacies that he needed reworked. And he found me through the Yellow Pages, not through any kind of networking. From that one individual, he took my name and told other people. I met other people. And eventually within two years, we had all the computer chacy rework business from Intel. I mean, we had eighteen feeders full of chacies that we were doing. Huge amount of things.

M: So was that a turning point then?

T: That was a turning point. Mhm.

M: And up until that time, were there any employees besides yourself?

T: Oh yea. We had five or six, maybe ten employees. But even that evolved away. We no longer do Chacies or anything like that.

M: Are you doing just original assembly now?

T: Yea, original assembly. Smaller assemblies. The chacies are done overseas now, cause there's so many of them for Intel. It's just a part of our evolution.

M: One thing that I should ask you too, to what extent, during all of these years, even before you started your business, to what extent have you maintained a Latino identity here in Washington County? Have you been in touch with or participating in the greater Latino community?

T: All the above. I've always been very proud of my heritage. I've never denied what I am. I've always eaten my beans and tortillas, and tamales and whatnot. I remember that my daughter in fact is on the board, and we are a member of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce downtown. We support all the Latino functions around here. I'm a member on the Latino Annual Gold Tournament. Where all the Latino's in the state get together for two days, and we all play golf together. And donate money for scholarships and that type of thing. We always go to high schools, talk to the Latino students. Cause we are a role model. And we want to show them that they can succeed. Most of the Latinos in school today are migrants. Which is almost a completely different culture then Latino's of an American birth.

M: Mhm.

T: So we do a lot with the community. Not only myself, but my daughter.

M: And are any of your employees from a Latino community as well?

T: Eighty percent of our employees are Latino.

M: Okay. Mhm.

T: Not because we seek them out. We're a business identity. We will take the best person we can to take the best job for us at a profit. It just so happens that most of the people applying for jobs are Latino, and they're good at it. And they're hard workers. And I don't respect any less. But we also have Koreans, we have African Americans, we have Vietnamese, and Anglo. It's a good mixture, and that's what we want. We don't want all Latino. We don't all Anglos.

Part one ends here

M: Hold on for a second, I'm going to put in another tape.... Okay. This is a continuation of the Oral History with Tino Ornelas. Okay, and I wonder if Tino, you yourself had felt there had been any barriers to you in, well first of all your settling here and working in Techtronics, and then later on founding your own business? Because of your Latino origin.

T: Never in Oregon. But let me give you something that happened to us in 1970, before I came to Oregon, I was up in Seattle. No I'm sorry, that's incorrect. We were here in Oregon already and I was already working at Tech. And in 1972, I think it was. I told my wife, ya know, "I'm getting very homesick, I need to go back to Colorado with my family, and all my family's there. And I'm the only one here in Oregon." And my wife says, "If that's what you want to do, let's do it." So I quit Techtronics, and I went back and lived in Boulder. And had a job in Denver. It was a small shop. Forty people maybe. And I'll never forget, the owner invited everybody out to lunch one day to go get pizza. Except me, he didn't want me to go. So I was sitting in there lunch room, all by myself, while everybody went out and had pizza. I was the only Latino in that shop by the way. And I'll never forget that. And I thought, why am I doing that? Why am I working here? And getting this kind of abuse? I mean, I'm a good worker. I know what I'm doing and all that kind of stuff. So just before Christmas, and we'd been there six months, just before Christmas my boss, my old boss from Techtronics called, and he said, and this guys and Anglo